

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

SEMAJ D. BEAL,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:11-cv-234

v.

Honorable Paul L. Maloney

INGHAM COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT,

Defendant.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A. The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, Plaintiff's action will be dismissed because Defendant is entitled to sovereign immunity.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff Semaj D. Beal presently is incarcerated at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility. Plaintiff sues the Ingham County Circuit Court.

According to the complaint, on August 13, 2010 Plaintiff was issued a major misconduct ticket for sexual misconduct. Following a hearing, he was convicted on August 25, 2010. Plaintiff sought rehearing, which was denied on September 22, 2010. On October 20, 2010, Plaintiff filed a petition for judicial review of the misconduct conviction. The Ingham County Circuit Court requested a certificate of prisoner accounting activity, and on January 5, 2011, ordered Plaintiff to pay within 21 days an initial partial filing fee of \$2.71. On January 24, 2011, Plaintiff filed a response, asserting that an appeal from an administrative agency decision is exempt from the filing fee requirements of MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.2963. In a letter dated January 31, 2011, the circuit court informed Plaintiff that his failure to pay the filing fee would result in the dismissal of his action. Because he lacked the necessary funds, Plaintiff was unable to pay the filing fee, and his action was dismissed.

For relief, Plaintiff seeks compensatory damages.

II. Immunity

The Ingham County Friend of the Court is immune from suit in this Court. Regardless of the form of relief requested, the states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts, unless the state has waived immunity or Congress has expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98-101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *O'Hara v. Wigginton*, 24 F.3d 823, 826 (6th Cir. 1993). Congress has not expressly abrogated Eleventh Amendment immunity by statute, *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 341 (1979), and the State of Michigan has not consented to civil rights suits in federal court. *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986). A state's Eleventh Amendment immunity from suit in the

federal courts is in the nature of a jurisdictional defense. *See Edelman v. Jordan*, 415 U.S. 651, 678 (1974). The Court may therefore raise Eleventh Amendment immunity on its own motion. *See Estate of Ritter v. Univ. of Mich.*, 851 F.2d 846 (6th Cir. 1988).

The circuit courts of the State of Michigan are clearly arms of the state and, thus, immune from suit. *See, e.g., Nicklay v. Eaton County Circuit Court*, No. 1:08-cv-211, 2008 WL 2139613, at *5 (W.D. Mich. May 20, 2008). Under the Michigan Constitution, the judiciary is a separate and independent branch of state government. *See Judicial Attorneys Ass’n v. State of Michigan*, 586 N.W.2d 894, 897-98 (Mich. 1998). Each state court is part of the “one court of justice” established by the Michigan Constitution. MICH. CONST. art. VI, § 1 (“The judicial power of the state is vested exclusively in one court of justice which shall be divided into one supreme court, one court of appeals, one trial court of general jurisdiction known as the circuit court, one probate court, and courts of limited jurisdiction that the legislature may establish by a two-thirds vote of the members elected to and serving in each house”); *see Smith v. Oakland County Circuit Court*, 344 F. Supp. 2d 1030, 1055 (E.D. Mich. 2004). The circuit courts are part of the state government, not the county or the city. *Judges of the 74th Judicial Dist. v. Bay County*, 190 N.W.2d 219, 224 (Mich. 1971). The Sixth Circuit squarely has held that suits against Michigan courts are barred by Eleventh Amendment sovereign immunity. *See Abick*, 803 F.2d at 877. The Sixth Circuit decision is but one of numerous federal court holdings recognizing Eleventh Amendment immunity in suits brought against the state courts. *See Harmon v. Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas*, 83 F. App’x 766, 768 (6th Cir. 2003); *Metz v. Supreme Court of Ohio*, 46 F. App’x 228, 236-37 (6th Cir. 2002); *Mumford v. Basinski*, 105 F.3d 264, 268-70 (6th Cir. 1997); *see also Brooks-McCollum v. Delaware*, 213 F. App’x 92, 94 (3d Cir. 2007); *Zabriski v. Court Admin.*, 172 F. App’x 906, 908

(11th Cir. 2006); *Wilson v. Puma County Superior Court*, 103 F. App'x 285, 286 (9th Cir. 2004); *Harris v. Champion*, 51 F.3d 901, 905-06 (10th Cir.1995). Furthermore, civil rights actions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 may only be brought against a “person,” and courts are clearly not persons within the meaning of the statute. *See Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989). The Ingham County Circuit Court must therefore be dismissed on grounds of Eleventh Amendment immunity.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff’s action will be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b) because the Ingham County Circuit Court is immune from suit.

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$455.00 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$455.00 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: March 25, 2011

/s/ Paul L. Maloney
Paul L. Maloney
Chief United States District Judge